

Secretary of State certified that the Colombian Government had met the human rights conditions in our law, and recommended the release of additional military aid. However, the report accompanying her certification also noted that “[w]hile the human rights performance of many of the Army’s units is improving, an exception is evidenced by continued accusations of human rights violations and collusion with paramilitaries against the Army’s 17th Brigade, which operates in northern Colombia. These reportedly include some 200 allegations involving the peace community of San Jose de Apartado in 2000–2001 and, most recently, of involvement in the killings near San Jose de Apartado in February 2005. . . . As a result of these allegations, the United States has informed the Government of Colombia that it will not consider providing assistance to the 17th Brigade until all significant human rights allegations involving the unit have been credibly addressed.”

While I might differ with the Secretary’s decision to make the certification at the time she did, which coincidentally occurred just hours before President Uribe’s arrival at President Bush’s ranch in Texas, I commend her decision to withhold aid to the 17th Brigade. It is noteworthy, however, that concerns about the 17th Brigade had been conveyed to the State Department well before this incident, including reports that its members were openly colluding with paramilitaries. Yet there is reason to believe that U.S. aid continued despite those reports.

This case presents the Bush administration with an important challenge. It shows that despite billions of dollars from the United States and lofty rhetoric about human rights, the Colombian Government’s initial reaction to this despicable crime was not appreciably different from what we saw years ago. They denied responsibility and blamed the victims even before an investigation began, and some of the key witnesses may not even have been interviewed 8 months later.

This is unfortunate because there has been progress on human rights under President Uribe’s government. Parts of the country are noticeably safer. The government reports a significant decline in violent crime. But labor leaders and human rights defenders are still threatened and killed, the judicial system remains sluggish, and impunity is more the rule than the exception. Clearly, much more needs to be done to protect human rights.

This case also presents a challenge for the Colombian Government to demonstrate, albeit belatedly, that it can respond with sympathy, with impartiality, and effectively to bring justice to the victims of a crime that epitomizes the worst of Colombia’s conflict.

I am also told that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights conducted its own investigation of the massacre, but that the Colombian Government has not re-

quested a copy of the report of that investigation. If this is correct I urge the government to do so immediately and to release as much of the report to the public as possible without compromising the investigation.

This conflict has brought nothing but suffering to the Colombian people. It has caused the deaths of countless innocent civilians, uprooted millions from their homes, and perpetuated the trade in illegal drugs that has corrupted many sectors of society. The people of San Jose de Apartado, with the conflict raging around them, sought to insulate themselves from this danger by declaring themselves a peace community. That strategy failed, as one after another of their members was brutally murdered.

Before February 21, I was not aware of the many tragedies this community had already suffered. While I do know, as a former prosecutor, that some crimes are harder to solve than others, in Colombia, as in so many countries, political will is often what really matters. It is imperative that this case not be added to the long list of unsolved, unpunished crimes in San Jose de Apartado, or become part of the history of impunity in Colombia. Whoever was responsible must be brought to justice.

Mr. President, I also want to mention the demobilization of paramilitaries that is underway in Colombia. We all want these narco-terrorist organizations to be dismantled, their commanders punished, their illegally acquired assets seized, and their victims compensated. The Colombian Government is asking the United States for millions of dollars to help finance the demobilization, and we want to help.

I am concerned, however, because if the demobilization of the paramilitary unit located in the area of San Jose de Apartado is indicative of the way this process is unfolding, there are serious problems that need to be addressed. According to reports I have received, paramilitaries are engaging in the same threatening and violent behavior, they continue to collude with the army, and some have joined the army. Little has changed for the people in that area who continue to live in fear of losing their property and their lives. I hope the Colombian authorities who have been touting the success of the demobilization process will investigate these reports.

THE GREAT AMERICAN SMOKEOUT

Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge an important event that is taking place today in Philadelphia, PA and across the Nation—the 29th Annual American Cancer Society Great American Smokeout.

We are all aware that cancer is one of the greatest healthcare risks facing Americans today. For years, this disease has taken the lives of our families, our friends, and our neighbors. As a

member of the bipartisan Senate Cancer Coalition, I certainly understand that there are few things that would have a greater impact on the quality of life, for millions throughout the world, than the eradication of this terrible disease.

Unfortunately, we are also all aware of the fact that we have not yet found a cure. And while scientists and researchers around the world work feverishly towards this lofty aspiration, the most important action we can take is the promotion of cancer prevention. The Great American Smokeout is a wonderful example of a successful program aimed at assisting those at great risk of developing cancer to change their ways. This annual event has, undoubtedly, saved lives.

Since the inaugural Great American Smokeout took place in 1976, this initiative has provided a powerful platform for the American Cancer Society to encourage Americans to stop smoking. This event, which urges Americans who take the unnecessary health risks associated with the use of tobacco products to band together and make a lifestyle change, is one of the most recognized awareness initiatives in the history of the American Cancer Society—and rightfully so. Rarely does any organization touch so many with its message in a single day as the American Cancer Society during the smokeout. And rarely is the intention of the message as important as reducing the number of Americans who use tobacco products.

I am also pleased that the American Cancer Society has chosen my home State to host this year’s smokeout. Pennsylvania has a long history of working with the American Cancer Society, and in 2002, together with the Pennsylvania Department of Health, they established the Pennsylvania Free Quitline. This toll-free service, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, provides advice and counseling to those attempting to quit smoking. Studies have shown that smokers who take advantage of such services are twice as likely to successfully quit smoking. By choosing Pennsylvania as the host for one of their most important events, the society is reaffirming its commitment to decreasing the prevalence of tobacco use in my state—and, in turn, improving the health of all Pennsylvanians.

Mr. President, these types of efforts have helped the American Cancer Society develop a reputation as one of the most influential and effective participants in the fight to better the health of every American. The Great American Smokeout is a vital event put on by a truly impressive organization, and I thank the American Cancer Society for its leadership.

COLON CANCER SCREEN FOR LIFE ACT

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Mr. President, I rise in support of the Colon Cancer Screen for Life Act, S. 1010. Some